



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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## **WSDA stresses summer food safety**

**OLYMPIA** – With Memorial Day around the corner it means that the summer outdoor barbecue season is about to go into full swing.

The Washington Department of Agriculture (WSDA) wants to remind residents to take some precautions to help them avoid food-borne illnesses that can range from mildly discomforting to a full-blown health threat.

Whether you are in your kitchen or enjoying the great outdoors, there are some food safety principles that remain constant, said Linda Condon, a WSDA food safety specialist.

### **Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold**

Meat and poultry products may contain bacteria that cause food-borne illness. They must be cooked to destroy the bacteria and held at temperatures that are either too hot or too cold for the bacteria to grow.

Most bacteria do not grow rapidly at temperatures below 40 °F or above 140 °F. The temperature range in between is known as the "Danger Zone." Bacteria multiply rapidly at these temperatures and can reach dangerous levels within two hours.

If you are traveling with cold foods, bring a cooler with plenty of ice or freezer packs. If you're camping for a few days, make sure that you replenish your cooler with ice regularly. If you plan to take meat along, pack it frozen. It will stay fresher and serve as a cold source as well.

If you are cooking, use a hot campfire or portable stove. It is difficult to keep foods hot without a heat source when traveling, so it's best to cook foods before leaving home, cool them, and transport them cold.

### **Use a Food Thermometer**

Another important piece of camping equipment is a *food thermometer*. If you are cooking meat or poultry on a portable stove or over a fire, you'll need a way to determine when it is done *and* safe to eat. Color is not a reliable indicator of doneness, and it can be especially tricky to tell the color of a food if you are cooking in a poorly-lit wooded area in the evening.

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When cooking hamburger patties on a grill or portable stove, use a digital thermometer to measure the temperature. Digital thermometers register the temperature in the very tip of the probe, so the safety of thin foods -- such as hamburger patties and boneless chicken breasts -- as well as thicker foods can be determined.

It is critical to use a food thermometer when cooking hamburgers. Ground beef may be contaminated with *E. coli* O157:H7, a particularly dangerous strain of bacteria. Illnesses have occurred even when ground beef patties were cooked until there was no visible pink.

The only way to insure that ground beef patties are safely cooked is to use a food thermometer, and cook the patty until it reaches 160 °F. For chicken, cook breasts or cutlets to 170 °F; legs and thighs to 180 °F. Pork should be cooked to 160 °F. Heat hot dogs and any leftover food to 165 °F. Be sure to clean the thermometer between uses.

### **Keep Everything Clean**

Bacteria may be present on raw meat and poultry products and can be easily spread to other foods by juices dripping from packages, hands, or utensils. When transporting raw meat or poultry, double wrap or place the packages in plastic bags to prevent juices from the raw product from dripping on other foods.

Always wash your hands before and after handling food, and don't use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat and poultry. Keep all ready to eat foods clearly separated from foods that require cooking. This will help reduce the risk of cross contamination. Soap and water are essential to cleanliness, so if you are going somewhere that will not have running water, bring it with you. Even disposable wipes will do.

### **U-pick Farms**

U-pick farms are a popular family activity in the summer. Here are a few safety tips:

Keep an eye on small children. Many U-pick areas are located away from machinery and other farm equipment, so make sure that children don't wander into areas that may not be completely safe or supervised. Also, many farms are located near busy roads so make sure children don't wander into traffic.

If you are allergic to bee stings try going to U-pick farms early in the day. Bees often don't become active until the warmer part of the day.

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Wash your produce carefully. Many disease-causing bacteria are present in soil or fertilizer. Also, wash your hands thoroughly after picking crops.

For more information on food safety go to the Washington State University Web site: <http://safefood.wsu.edu/>. Other information is available at <http://www.foodsafety.gov/>. Other sources include the Washington Department of Health, <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/food.htm>; the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/advice.html#prepare>; and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food\\_Safety\\_Education/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/index.asp).

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